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‘Back to the Real London’; or Mapping the City of the Past in Gaiman’s *Neverwhere*

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Abstract: Neil Gaiman’s acclaimed novel *Neverwhere* belongs to the rapidly growing sub-genre of urban fantasy. Set in 20th century London, the novel evokes fantastical and supernatural elements to paint the history of the city and encompasses its historic memory. The city is divided into two separate spaces, London Above and London Below, that are parallel to one another and mirror each other. Lower London contains all that is suppressed by London Above and inhabits all that is lost and forgotten (certain moments in history, those in need, broken objects, etc.) The repressed ‘things’ eventually haunt the city of London Above and exist within their own terms of fantastical reality in London Below.

This paper focuses on Gaiman’s emphasized allusions to the 19th century as the main influential era on the city’s development as both a socially oppressive space but also a fantastical one. Therefore, associating it with neo-Victorian fantastical genres; steampunk and gaslamp fantasy. Drawing upon known Victorian symbols, such as the London Underground or the London fog, Gaiman renders them into having double meanings and thus, deepens our understanding of the city’s historical and social memory. The dichotomy of classes and societies presented in both versions of London stresses the cultural and social gaps of the city. Examining the purpose of the fantastical and the way it functions in the novel with relation to history (the 19th century in particular), leads to a thorough understanding of the city’s social milieu in past and present.

Keywords: urban fantasy, London, Neil Gaiman, 19th century, social history, memory.

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Neil Gaiman’s *Neverwhere* (1996) is an urban fantasy novel, taking place in 20th century London and reimagining the division of the city’s space as a social one, in which lower classes live in “London Below” while middle and upper classes inhabit “London Above”. The protagonist, Richard Mayhew, arrives to London as an outsider, consequentially, enabling him to view the city as a neutral spectator. Mayhew’s extraordinary ability to notice the disregarded lower classes (such as

the homeless and the poor) serves as a mediation between the separate spaces. London Below is a space of fragmented time and space, constructed of different “tiny spurs of old-time” as well as people who have been forgotten by dwellers of London Above (Gaiman 78). More importantly, it functions as the space in which history and fantasy bleed into one another.

In this paper I will review specific historical representation of the Victorian era (the Underground, the London Fog and social researcher, Henry Mayhew) and discuss the way in which the author modifies them to function in the fantastical realm of London Below. This modification, however, also facilitates a repurposing of past representations as a way of commenting on the present. Furthermore, by reviewing facets of the Victorian era (often described as the peak of social class division), this paper suggests that the London represented in *Neverwhere* is an allegorical representation of a class-society, one that is a fantastical projection of the present, and one that spatializes class divisions on to space.

The process of Richard Mayhew’s both physical and metaphysical ascendance from contemporary London to the fantastical one, due to its nature as described above, involves an inevitable indulgence with different social classes of different centuries. However, his ascendance is not a consensual one; he is drawn by accident into the fantastical underworld of London which lies beneath the pavements and streets. The urban landscape is an all-encompassing, active and occasionally humanized participant, its force represented in the final chapters of the novel as an actual monster living in the underground heart of the city. According to Alexander C. Irvine’s definition of urban fantasy, Gaiman’s London operates as a separate being because, unlike other urban fantasy novels “in which urban is a descriptor applied to *fantasy*”, in *Neverwhere* “*fantasy* alters *urban*” (Irvine 200). Indeed, Gaiman’s novel applies fantastical tropes to the urban landscape, however, he extends, to borrow Irvine’s words, the “contingent dread of the historicized urban present” (211). The tension between the tradition of fairy tales and fantasy and the history of the city shapes our understanding of London’s past; through which, we can then, criticize the present.

Since the genre of urban fantasy is not limited to London nor neo-Victorianism, it would be appropriate to refer to the fantastical Victorian elements of the story as belonging to the rapidly emerging steampunk aesthetic (an intergeneric hybrid of neo-Victorianism, science-fiction and fantasy). Taking into account the novel’s preoccupation with social hierarchy and the distress of the lower classes, it correlates when discussing Victorian symbols, with Catherine Siemann’s characterization of the “steampunk social problem novel” (3). Its main purpose is to incorporate the distinctly Victorian genre of the social problem novel (mostly associated to Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, etc.) with a the present, and provides us with a “present-day perspective on the Victorians and their legacy” (Siemann 4). The structure of the city, its division into two stratified spaces, provides a clear and quite visible distinction between the present and the past and serves as a convenient arrangement for comparison. By applying the steampunk aesthetic to the city’s past, Victorian symbols are transformed, have alternate interpretations, and presents us with “a way of engaging with issues”, of the past and which “are present for us now” (Siemann 5).

Seeing the Past

London Above presents a hyperbolized representation of commercialism and aggressive touristic propaganda of the late 20th century and contemporary London. Gaiman describes the city as despising tourists while needing and luring them with its “red bricks and white stone, red buses and large black taxis, bright red mailboxes and green grassy parks...” (8). Whether in the actual streets or the underground stations, London Above is a spectacle of advertisements and colourful shops stuffed with touristic memorabilia which blatantly cheapen London’s historic symbols such as “the shop that sold souvenir London police helmets and little red London buses” (Gaiman 43). This fixation on tacky and cliché representations of the city’s past, diverts tourists from some of Britain’s

and London's darker historic periods; colonialism and racism, extreme social-economic gaps, exploitive conditions of labour and the impoverished masses. As Gaiman puts it "London grew into something huge and contradictory... it was a fine city, but there is a price to be paid for all good places, and a price that all good places have to pay" (10). Put differently, London sacrifices those who cannot or will not conform to social standards and suppresses them, both literally and figuratively, into its underground core, leaving an inviting and mesmerising veneer.

The hierarchical spatialization of the city accentuates its distinct social division and enables the reader to observe the space below, which also represents the past, from an elevated viewpoint and 'read' the city and its history. In his chapter, "Walking in the City", Michel de Certeau gazes upon the metropolis while standing on top of a 110 story building. "To be lifted" he writes, "transfigures (the observer) into a voyeur. It transforms the bewitching world... into a text that lies before one's eyes" (Gaiman 92). However, he asserts, the elevated position of the voyeur means he is no longer in the "city's grasp" and therefore, as he does not immerse in the city, he is no longer an integral part of it. The inhabitants of London Above are unable to read the city in de Certeau's sense for two reasons: firstly, they are blind to the poor and the homeless; Richard's fiancée at the beginning of the novel literally "stepped over (a) crumpled form" (Gaiman 23). Therefore, they cannot comprehend and in turn see or acknowledge the validity of London Below and its existence. If one cannot observe the city below them from an elevated viewpoint, they cannot 'read' the city. Secondly, they are an integral part of the city; rather than having the ability of comprehending the it as detached spectators, they are the spectacle of its rhythm. The dwellers of London Above are faceless masses pouring in "hundreds . . . onto the platform, and hundred . . . trying to get on" (Gaiman 248) The reader, on the other hand, has the privilege of viewing both levels of the city as a detached observer, or rather voyeur, who due to Gaiman's mapping of it can better understand its narrative.

As reference point, appearing at the preface of the novel, Gaiman uses an actual map to navigate through London, a map of the London Underground. Yet, it is a map he has constructed by gathering all of the Underground stations, in past and present and is therefore, not rooted in any specific historic moment. But more significantly, he chooses to mention the stations that were once opened and, from a certain point in time to this day, have been closed. By doing so, he acknowledges the inevitable relation between space and time and provides both a spatial and temporal mapping of the city. Furthermore, his choice to include forgotten stations, or rather 'ghost stations', that still exist in non-fictional London, recognizes the impact of those spaces on the shaping of the city's both actual and fictional geography. Gaiman's inclusive map becomes a representation of the historical materialism of the city in itself – shaping the infrastructure of the city, both of the present and past.

Denis Cosgrove argues that maps are a representational illustration of the landscape, structuring the world "so that it may be appropriated by a detached, individual spectator to whom the illusion of order and control is offered through the composition of space . . ." (55). The 'composition of space' offered to Richard Mayhew at the beginning of the novel, in the form of an umbrella with the Underground map (a contemporary one, not Gaiman's), is meant to assist him in making sense of London as a newcomer. However, the map bears no significance to him as he gives away the umbrella to a homeless woman (an action foreshadowing his character and future actions throughout the story). Once he arrives to the city, unlike other city dwellers who live according to the Tube map, he rejects it and soon realizes the "map was a handy fiction that made life easier but bore no resemblance to the reality of the shape of the city above" (Gaiman 9). Cosgrove asserts that representations of the landscape, such as maps, are formed to portray the point of view "produced by the sovereign eye" (48). Richard's refusal to navigate through London using the map, a conventional and unchallenged perception of space, marks him as a potential individual who will

eventually be spat out of the ordinary city space of London Above and become a part of the alternate space of London Below.

Moving Through Space and Time: The Underground

In his book *London Underground*, David Ashford discusses the ways in which the Underground has unrecognizably changed the cultural geography of the capital, not only in the demographic and cultural sense but also, its conceptual space. The method of its construction was named 'cut-and-cover' in which the entire street was dug out and then covered. It was the railways' proximity to the surface and the process of its creation that, according to Ashford, "was itself a blatant staging of the interrelationship between the two spaces, gaping wounds opened up in the middle of public thoroughfares" (xi). The process of digging and revealing layers of the city's architecture and history, only to cover them again created physical layers of history suppressed under the industrialized space. Hadas Elber-Aviram argues in her article, reviewing the relation between architecture and urban fantasy, that the layers of history in any city perform as "successive (layers) beneath the present-day veneer of the routine city life" and are applied in *Neverwhere* to the fictional depiction of space (2). If history is imagined to occupy space as literal layers of time one on top of another, the Underground, particularly, would be the closest to the surface of 20th century London. Its proximity, is not only spatial but also temporal, being a creation of the preceding era.

The Underground's construction began in 1854 and was promoted by reforming campaigner Charles Pearson who, according to Heawon Hwang's *London's Underground Spaces*, "envisaged the railway service (as having) a standard low fare for the working classes" and was meant to serve them primarily (83). However, his vision was not met and fares ranged depending on the class-divided coaches, rendering the train into another socially torn space and perpetuating the socio-economic gaps. Although it did immensely improve the working classes' transportation conditions, the "private Underground enterprise also aimed to attract middle-class passengers" and offered first class carriages and separate waiting areas (Hwang 84). Eventually and despite all these efforts, the "commingling of classes was inevitable" and fare rates were standardized in the 1880's (Hwang 84).

Consequentially, as Ashford asserts, the train became a familiar space shared by all social classes of the city. The train in *Neverwhere* correlates with the socially unified conception of the Underground in the sense that both commuters of London Above (representing the middle and upper classes) and London Below (representing lower classes) use the train and its functions as the only space both worlds share. Be that as it may, it alludes to mid-Victorian attempts of spatialized class distinctions. Although there are no coaches in the contemporary Underground, at least not in the sense used in the preceding eras, the train serves the two separate societies in very different ways. For the dwellers of upper London, the train moves in orderly structured tracks and conforms to the linear progression of time, enabling them to use it in a strictly functional and practical manner. On the other hand, inhabitants of London Below can move by will to any station they choose, and the train metaphorically transports them into sporadic pockets of history. In fact, there are cars used solely by the people from London Below and others used by London Above.

Gaiman's reimagining and repurposing of a clear Victorian symbol, taps into the term "retrofuturism" as it is used in the steampunk context. Mike Perschon defines the term as "conjur(ing) up images of antiquated technology" motivated by nostalgia (21). The actual physicality of the train is not transformed in the novel (it is still our contemporary version), the retrofuturism aspect is expressed in the figurative and conceptual image of the train since it functions and is perceived, in an allegoric way, through a Victorian perspective. In this sense, the function of the train in the novel resembles Victorian society more than modern one. The apparent separation between the two types of passengers mimics the social dynamics of the former century.

London Above passengers do not seem to notice the people of London Below who “have fallen through the cracks” of the city’s streets and consciousness (Gaiman 136). According to Ashford novels such as *Neverwhere*, embody modern society’s fear of the progression of the machine. They provide a vision of “society threatened on one hand by the sterility of a mechanical functionalism and on the other by the catastrophe that the elimination of the human must eventually bring about” (Ashford 8). These novels express the dread of society becoming a faded ghost of the machine as industry and technology surpass humanity. Although it appears that the inhabitants of lower London haunt the present, the question to be asked is whether the ghosts of the city are commuters of upper or lower London. As the former get on and off the train in synchronised masses, they are attuned to the “standard time”, a timetable of the trains, governing their lives. These time conventions began in the early 19th century with the railway’s expanded mechanization, and since then “the entire population move(s) in mechanical synchrony” (Sussman 244). Therefore, they move as a coordinated machine and are oblivious to anything but their formulated reality; they cannot see the fantasy of the world parallel and below them.

Although the novel is generically categorized as urban fantasy (by works such as *Core Collections in Genre Studies* and scholars such as Irvin and Karin Kukkonen), its metaphoric treatment of society as a machine, along with its allusions to steampunk, associate the novel with Science Fiction. One of the prominent themes Sci-Fi touches upon is the perception of time. Fredric Jameson observes that in Sci-Fi time is spiral rather than linear, to create a “feeling that any other moment of the past would have done just as well” which is exactly what the novel does, as different capsules of times exist side by side or one instead of another (Jameson 150). History in London Below is fractured and reassembled to create an alternative interpretation within a similar context such as the “floating market”; a medieval street market taking place in the prestigious “Harrods” department store, featuring stalls with curries, blacksmith’s service, weapons, lamps with candles, tattooists and a slave market (Gaiman 109–11).

Furthermore, in terms of Sci-Fi, the novel also correlates with Seo-Young Chu’s definition of the genre. According to Chu, Sci-Fi is rather a mode and not a genre that can be applied to any narrative. Her definition of it asserts that while in reality “literal dimensions operate independently from (their) figurative dimensions”, in Sci-Fi, metaphors are literalized and “bring to life the complex ambivalences latent in figures of speech associated with the global world” (Chu 86–87). While Chu refers to Sci-Fi, this assertion can be applied to other genres of fiction as literalized words, names, phrases as well as metaphors, usually pack in several meanings that are either parallel or layered. Chu’s definition is significant since it offers an analysis relevant to the way in which literalized figures of speech operate in London Below.

In subterranean London, names of stations, people and idioms, are all literal and are treated as us such by its inhabitants. As previously mentioned, the dwellers of London Above, Richard Mayhew among them, are unaware of the fantastical world below and are not exposed to the multi-layered interpretation of every word and name surrounding them. Although Richard is treated throughout the novel by the London Below people as an outsider, an “upperworlder”, he has an exceptional ability for seeing things that others ignore (he notices and endorses each and every homeless person he encounters). Once he enters the world of London Below, Richard’s talent is tested as he is required to notice and question the most mundane of things to every Londoner. For instance, while walking in the Underground with his London Below companions, he ignores “the disembodied male voice that warned ‘Mind the Gap’... Richard barely heard it anymore – it was like aural wallpaper” (Gaiman 141). However, as people and historical events do not go unnoticed in London Below, so do the sounds that shape the urban experience; everything has a deeper implication. Richard soon discovers that the gap should be minded not because one might fall into the crack between the platform and the train, but rather because a “diaphanous, dreamlike, (a)

ghost-thing” shaped as a tentacle wraps itself around people’s ankle’s and “pull(s) (them) toward the edge of the platform” meaning to swallow them into the dark cracks (Gaiman 141–142).

Furthermore, the names of the stations are literalized places, articulating the idea that layered meanings along with abstract concepts occupy physical space. Richard was wondering “whether there really was a circus at Oxford Circus: a real circus with clowns, beautiful women and dangerous beasts” (Gaiman 4). He soon discovers that in Shepherd’s Bush station there are actual shepherds and sheep whom Richard should “pray” not to meet, in Knight’s Bridge station there are knights guarding a bridge as well as the darkness of night, and Earl’s Court station is both a royal feudal court and a place of legal judgment. These places have a tendency to “take their toll” and incorporate people into their existence, such as when a character named Anaesthesia is taken by the creatures of the night on Knight’s Bridge (Gaiman 105). Words have numerous meanings, yet in Gaiman’s version, space is threatening to consume the living for the sake of self-preservation. Similarly to the tentacle-figured monster living in the gaps, the literalized and fantastical representations of London Below literally feed on people and drag them into darkness. Those people, such as Anaesthesia, never reappear and become an actual part of the places that swallowed them; people physically merge into landmarks and locations constructing the urban mosaic. For Gaiman the toll or rather price the city pays to maintain its visual façade is the sacrifice of people who live in London Below; people who have been rejected from mainstream society.

Exploring the Underworld: Henry Mayhew

Gaiman’s division of London Above and London Below is a simplified and highly visual structure of social geography; the lower-classes live beneath the upper-middle classes. The notion, however, that the social dichotomy divides the city into two separate spaces, both known as “London”, derives from ideas rooted in the Victorian era. Herbert Sussman discusses the process of industrialization and its socio-economic influences on the population and the landscape. The contrast between the urban middle and upper classes in London’s West End versus the impoverished masses in the East End was severe to the extent that Sussman refers to the two spaces as “two nations”(Sussman 249). Any attempt to mediate between the two districts “necessarily involved a journey, socially between classes, geographically between districts, imaginatively between cultures . . .” (Sussman 249). In the novel, the social tensions of the previous century are exemplified and offer a literalized mapping of the city’s social geography; rather than placing all classes on the same level, they are hierarchically reorganized in the city’s space. Thus, Gaiman’s London encompasses similar spatialized distinctions between classes as those of Victorian London in the sense that they both inhabit the same place comprised of two different spaces.

Sussman extends his metaphor of the distance between the two classes and refers to the “journey” from the West End to the East End as “analogous to colonial exploration” (a metaphor used by earlier scholars such as Raymond Williams and Asa Briggs). Middle class writers felt it was their moral and social obligation to write about and represent the strives of the working classes to improve their conditions by filling in the huge gaps of lacking information regarding their situation. One of the writers Sussman points out is Henry Mayhew who recorded “his own travels into the unknown country of the poor” (249). In Mayhew’s work, *London Labour and the London Poor*, he explores the slums, records and talks to the people, and categorizes the population into racial, occupational and social groups. The remarkable aspect of Mayhew’s work was his lively descriptions of the different characters he encountered as well as his insistence on a vast amount of details. Although Mayhew’s study is a distinguished and thorough account of the working classes, it is a controversial one, as James Buzard argues that it refers to “the lower orders of British society as parasitic nomads” (451). Nevertheless, Henry Mayhew and his work are considered “far ahead of

their time in insisting that any steps toward social reform must be firmly based on detailed, dispassionate investigation of a sort that had never been done before . . ." (Hibbert, xvi).

Richard Mayhew's character and name, as Gaiman has confirmed on several interviews as well as his official website, is based on Henry Mayhew and his work. The resemblance between the journeys of the two into the "lower" realm of London cannot be ignored as Gaiman's attempt appears to be one of exposé of social injustices by evoking Mayhew's figure. Similarly to Henry Mayhew, Richard serves as a guide to his uninformed reader and his exploration of the underworld is structured to map the labyrinth of the unexplored past. Walking in London Below, Richard cannot tell apart the different tunnels of the underground system; he asks his companions "Don't all these tunnels look the same? ... How can you tell which is which?" to which he is scoffed at for his ignorance (Gaiman 135). The omniscient narrator stresses that the tunnels look nothing alike, mentioning one is from Regency while another was modified during WWII. Richard's incapability to differentiate between them echoes Henry Mayhew's reports of his findings. As the latter walks down the section assigned to the impoverished immigrants he writes:

The little courts and alleys that spring from it (the quarter) on each side. Some of these courts branching off from them, so that the locality is a perfect labyrinth of "blind alleys;" and when once in the heart of the maze it is difficult to find the path that leads to the main-road (Gaiman 109).

Both Mayhews are outsiders who cannot truly perceive the textuality of their surroundings, they belong to another layer of society and try to translate their findings into terms appropriate to the reality they know.

To make sense of the sights in this unfamiliar world, Richard begins to write a mental diary – a Victorian Bourgeoisie action in itself - recording facts and details of the people around him. Much like Henry Mayhew he tries to remain a detached spectator, however, ends up commenting on what he perceives as peculiarities: "We had some fruitcake for breakfast; the marquis had a large lump of it in his pocket. Why would anyone have a large lump of fruitcake in his pocket?" (Gaiman 136). A comparable observational and surprised tone can be detected in Henry Mayhew's writing. He notes in his preface "people have been mostly found to be astonishingly correct in their statements"; genuinely surprised by the lower-classes' ability to express themselves truthfully (Mayhew iii). The lower classes were "reduced to a monolithic identity" by the upper classes and Henry Mayhew, serving as the advocate between the two, tried to categorize the poor as a "collection of different social groups" (Keunen and de Droogh, 105) Therefore, he divided the population into races, classifying them according to their exterior appearance thus, alluding to the popular discipline of phrenology. He assigns them names such as "running patterers" and "death-hunters", and expresses his surprise from the "odd and sometimes original manner in which an intelligent patterer, for example, will express himself" (Mayhew 214, 255).

As Gaiman, or rather the narrator, focalize on Richard, he satirically mimics Mayhew's classification of the lower-classes and hyperbolizes it by referring to people as "rat-speakers" or "upperworlders". In his writing, Gaiman employs the collective descriptors of groups to enhance the fantastical element rather than to racially profile. He portrays the rat-speakers as "mov(ing) in scurries: moments of stillness, followed by hasty dashes . . ." (Gaiman 68). Furthermore, he incorporates phrenology as a discipline determining individual or group characteristics according to external attributes, only to reject it. In his description of the two villains, Mr. Croup and Mr. Vandemar, he provides four visual characteristics to assist in telling them apart, however, ironically concluding, after an extensive account, "also, they look nothing at all alike" (Gaiman 7). Thus, Gaiman, in addition to evoking Mayhew's character, mockingly employs a similar anthropological approach to better map and study the underworld classes.

Apart from his role as a mock anthropologist, Richard's character correlates with urban literary tropes, such as the flaneur and the detective, as well as a mythological one. Irvine, argues that the notion of the fantastic city can be traced all the way back to Babylon known as "both the City of God and the City of Man" (202). Therefore, it is no surprise that urban fantasy alludes to its roots by employing mythological tropes. Specifically to *Neverwhere*, Irvin detects that the trope used is of the anti-hero who has to travel through the underworld, eventually transcending and "return(ing) with a prize" often in the form of wisdom (Greek mythology references such as Hercules and Orpheus come to mind) (204). On the other hand, the flaneur is a more modern trope originating in 19th century Paris, elaborately discussed in Walter Benjamin's *The Arcades Project*. The flaneur is a male middle class urban pedestrian who has the privilege of lingering, wandering, browsin gand walking down the streets in a "combination of distracted observation and (a) dreamlike reverie" (Benjamin 36). Gaiman integrates these figures with a third one, the urban detective (such as Sherlock Holmes), a Victorian character defined by Raymond Williams as an individual "who can find his way through the fog, who can penetrate the intricacies of the streets" and make sense of them (227). Thus, Richard epitomizes a fusion of all three figures, resulting in a character who is observant, knowledgeable, able to explore the deep of the city and produce a coherent narrative of it on all its levels.

Suffocating the Weak: The London Fog and Death

The London fog appears in the final chapters of the novel and functions as an element of initiation; an ordeal that the protagonist has to face before the climactic scene of his journey. Once Richard crosses the London fog, which occupies the darkest spaces of London Below, he is able to fully comprehend the underworld and its "intricacies". Relatively lifted in 1956 due to the Clean Air Act, the London fog, according to E. Melanie DuPuis, was caused by a rapidly industrialized nation and culminated in the 19th century. It soon became a dominant literary motif for Victorian novelists who's cause for writing was similar to Henry Mayhew's in the sense of raising awareness to the lower classes' condition. The fog performed as a symbolic visual representation of the ramifications of industrialization and created "many vivid descriptions" in 19th century fiction (DuPuis 18). For instance, in his *Oliver Twist*, Dickens writes: "The fog was much heavier than it had been in the early part of the night . . . Oliver's hear and eyebrows . . . had become stiff . . ." (253) It symbolized society's disregard of lower-classes' circumstances as it effected the working class more than others and as DuPuis asserts resulted in an approximate of 12,000 deaths and numerous diseases.

In the novel, the fog is referred to by its cockney street name "pea-souper" and therefore alludes to and is used within the context of the lower classes. It leads Richard to his final reflection of the oppressive dynamics of the city. Walking through it, Richard reacts badly to the smothering fog and unaware of its fatal influences, exhibiting the common ignorance of both the standard "upperworlder" (as referred to in the novel) as well as middle class Victorian individuals. When he is told by his companions of London Below of its fatal consequences, he asks whether the people it killed belonged to upper or lower London. One of his companions replies "your people" and Richard "was willing to believe it", thus marking his recognition of the catastrophic influence of the upper and middle classes obliviousness (Gaiman 228). London Below contains the fog because it is formed by "things and places (that) stay the same, like bubbles in amber" (Gaiman 228). Once he crosses the fog, the final barrier between him and the "prize", he is able to successfully reject his own past and battle the demons of society.

Richard is then thrown into a metaphysical version of Blackfriars station (guarded by friars wearing black) and must choose whether to complete the process of his present erasure from history and kill himself or remain a part of the past by staying in London Below. From the moment Richard associates with dwellers of London Below his former life no longer exists and he vanishes from the

city's memory. In her discussion of *Neverwhere*, Elber-Aviram argues that “the worst part of the protagonist's erasure from collective history and individual memory is that (he) too begin(s) to doubt the validity of (his) existence” (7). That is to say, once Richard no longer belongs to London Above or rather upper-middle class, he is marginalized and is lead to believe he bears no significance to society. Furthermore, Ashford claims: “kicked and buffeted by commuters in London Underground, Richard's profound alienation, his status as a non-person, is forcibly impressed upon him by the space itself”; the familiar space of the station alters into his worst personal nightmare (Ashford 172).

Surrounded by hallucinations of his former best friend and ex-fiancée (from London Above), a horrific version of the recorded Underground message, distorted advertisements and a consistent “savagely sequence of jump-cuts, freeze-frames, fast-forwards and flash-backs”, Richard questions his place in society as well as his sanity (Ashford 172). As the Underground posters keep belligerently promoting credit cards and holidays abroad they offer Richard to “END IT ALL” and “HAVE A FATAL ACCIDENT TODAY” (Gaiman 247). They lure Richard, tempting and pushing him to return and become a part of present reality, of London Above, by throwing himself onto the tracks and causing a delay in the train's schedule by becoming “an incident at Blackfriars Station” (Gaiman 249). In other words, his death would disrupt the steady pace of life in London Above, therefore, the impact of his death would make him a part of it, even for a brief moment. Once again, the train becomes an indicator of time. If London Below represents the past and London Above represents the present, then Richard has to figuratively stop time (or rather the train) to transport from one temporal space to another.

After Richard overcomes “the ordeal”, the final test of his journey, he is offered the opportunity to return to his former reality to which he agrees. However, life back in London Above appears dreary and worthless. He recounts to Gary, his best friend, the adventures of London Below, exposing him to the reality of the homeless and poor, the space below London and all its fantastical sights. However, his friend replies “I've passed the people who fall through the cracks, Richard: they sleep in shop doorways all down the Strand. They don't go to a special London. They freeze to death in the winter” (Gaiman 366). Gary belongs to London Above, to the social class that is blind to the condition of those in need, he tries to face Richard with his perspective on what he conceives to be the only existing reality. When Richard insists that there is more to the city that can be seen, Gary cannot or perhaps will not believe; he says that anything “is more likely than (a) magical London underneath” and declares: “give me boredom” (Gaiman 366). People in London Above would rather live in oblivion, whether they are ignorant of the condition of the lower classes or the existence of a parallel fantasy world is insignificant. The point is, that they are content with their blindness. Richard, whose eyes have been opened, has become acutely aware of the people around him, attentive to the homeless and poor, while the city remains a cold and cruel entity. Now that he is fully aware of the lower-classes and the world below he “must continue to live on the margins, in the realm of the forgotten”, he eventually returns to London Below and quits London Above indefinitely (Elber-Aviram 7).

Conclusion

Although *Neverwhere* draws upon symbols of other centuries and does not exclusively belong to the category of neo-Victorian texts, the Victorian impact on the structure of the city is inevitable. Even more so since the actual space below London was made possible by the digging of the underground railway and the sewage system; both constructed in mid-19th century. Other than the three elements reviewed in this paper, the novel employs a variety of other Victorian representations: an abandoned Victorian hospital, cockney accents, Victorian attire (trench coats and high collars), etc. The important thing is that the fantastical setting of the novel is the same tunnels and pipes that the 19th

century produced. Gaiman's transformation of the space and use of Victorian inventions forces the reader to link and compare the past to the present, correlating with the steampunk aesthetic.

The reader is then left to question the purpose for which the fantastical is applied to these elements. This paper has suggested that Gaiman means to comment on the severe social gaps of contemporary London, which in many ways are similar to London of the 19th century. His reconstructing and mapping of the city and mimicking the social geography of Victorian London enable such a reading. The novel, therefore, employs the fantastic to draw our attention to concerns that have been drowned by the hectic modern metropolitan. In the final chapter, Richard Mayhew's reaction to the world around him in *London Above* is exactly the kind of awareness the novel strives to raise; he chooses to skip buying his regular newspaper, preferring to read "the other people on the train, faces of every kind and colour" (Gaiman 360). It appears that he favours the recognition of the people around him over the narrative *London Above* has to offer. The actual city is no longer a mesmerising spectacle, but rather the vast variety of people and characters who inhabit it.

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